

1. Call to order
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Draft of Woodstock Agricultural Commission’s section of the 2012 POCD

Following are the Woodstock Agricultural Commission’s recommendations for inclusion in the Plan of Conservation and Development. Continued local action, interest and citizen support will be necessary to provide for the continued existence and viability of our local agriculture.

AGRICULTURE EDUCATION

General Public:

- Encourage and support our farms to participate in “The Barn Doors are Open in Woodstock” (example of the name of the program); an open house for farms.
- Continuously update the public on Agriculture Commissions activities via brochures, website, newspaper articles, press releases, and other media outlets such as cable television (Channel 14) and WINY radio.
- Seek funding through the town, private donors and non-profit organizations when funds are needed (i.e. printing of brochure). The first Woodstock Agriculture Brochure was printed with funds obtained through a grant from the AGvocate Program with The Last Green Valley.
- Celebrating Agriculture and the Woodstock Fair continue to be the top venues for promoting farming in The Last Green Valley, and specifically in Woodstock. Continue to find new ways to support both organizations in their efforts.

Future Farmers:

- Support the “Ag in the Classroom” program by volunteering and encouraging other interested community members to volunteer.
- Expand current “Career Day” in local schools to include local farmers.
- Support and expand the Killingly Vo-Ag outreach efforts in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades through the distribution of the existing Vo-Ag DVD, and other educational tools for all grades as they pertain to agriculture.
- Identify local students interested in pursuing a career in agriculture and create opportunities for mentoring and/or internships.

Existing Farmers:

- Encourage all farms to participate in existing workshops via CT Farm Bureau, CT DOAG, and Commodity Groups and coordinate effort to host special workshops pertinent to existing farmers.
- Help match up local students with farmers for mentoring and/or internships.
- Encourage the community to support farmers on their farms, through other committees and commissions, and at farmers markets.

AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES

- Continue to support existing agricultural businesses which are a very strong and vibrant part of the Woodstock community

- Many types of Agriculture commodities currently existing have needed to further diversify to survive the ups and downs of the economy along with facing weather, disease, regulations, etc. Communicate these issues via the media.
- Share examples of how current agricultural businesses have made changes in their businesses to grow the business for family reasons along with surviving the many challenges farms/agribusinesses face on a daily basis.
- Support locally grown and CT grown, to further the growing “Buy Local” movement and further capitalize on the advantages of a stable, trustworthy, local food market.
- Support the communication and education process explaining the benefits and high quality standards held by the local agricultural community. The more educated the consumer and the greater the appreciation the consumer has in regards to the high quality of local food, all work to improve the viability of the local agricultural businesses. Farmers need to be able to sell produce at “on-farm sales”, Farmers Markets and other retail outlets. The Commission will take advantage of opportunities to support these efforts.
- Help “market” the benefits that these local agricultural businesses provide to local churches, fire departments, educational programs and other local businesses. Emphasize how integral they are to the fabric of the town.

AGRI-TOURISM

The town, working through the agriculture commission, shall continue to promote local farming enterprises and agriculture attractions as destinations for out of state and regional travelers. Activities may include:

- Continue to support Celebrating Agriculture Day
- Showcase agricultural products including food that is locally grown through local media, at Celebrating Agriculture Day and The Woodstock Fair and where ever appropriate.
- Showcase agriculture's contributions to the environment through local media, at Celebrating Agriculture Day and The Woodstock Fair and where ever appropriate.
- Work with Connecticut Farm Bureau and other local Ag commissions/groups, including The Last Green Valley organization and the NE Council of Governments to promote local, regional and statewide agriculture
- Produce an annual calendar of agriculture events which include agriculture attractions/destinations and farm tours given by farm owners. Calendars could be promoted through local tourism groups, the Hospitality industry and chambers of commerce

FORESTRY

Forests provide many products/services and should be properly managed so that they continue to provide timber, firewood, recreation, wildlife, maple syrup as well as open space.

- Help market the recreational opportunities in our forests such as: Hunting, fishing and hiking
- Encourage proper timber harvesting of existing forests so that future timber harvesting can be completed with firewood coming as a valuable by-product of proper timber harvesting.
- Support the agribusinesses which rely on forests as an integral part of producing food and products like maple syrup.
- Encourage education and training that recognizes that the future of the forest is dependent on good management practices that are learned from knowledgeable professionals, or from receiving education and management training from trusted websites such as clear.uconn.edu.
- Work with the Town to ensure that town owned land be properly managed in order for the town to benefit from the sale of products or services.

AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES AND THE CONSUMER

Woodstock has the potential to maintain more open space by actively working to make farming as attractive as possible. Environmental and conservation, rural character issues and more are all intertwined, and public policy and regulations must create a charter for this growth. The global recognition of what is healthy is shifting and evolving. The healthier/environmentally conscious consumer is an important market for our local producers.

- Identify ways to capitalize and support the local farming environment that is greatly influenced by the current “Buy Local, Think Global” mindset of consumers.
- Many consumers that are part of the Woodstock’s market are health conscious, and environmentally concerned. Look for ways to capitalize on that trend via communication/education
- Capitalize on the trend of the consumer’s current interest in food and farming through marketing opportunities, open houses, etc.
- Continue to emphasize the environmental value of the local farmer who “lives where he/she farms” as well as the niche farmer/specialty farmer who provides the potential for Woodstock to maintain open space and a healthy environment.

- Attempt to preserve and grow the local farms on-site sales, recognizing the competition from the trend of the consumer to have a backyard garden, poultry for eggs, or participate in a Community Garden. Support the on-site sales of local farms vs. the supermarket which is our farmer's greatest competition.
- Work with local physicians/hospitals to help show the relationship of the high cost/economics of unhealthy people vs. cost savings and the advantages of healthful eating and living in a more environmentally clean and sustainable environment. More people want to be healthier and are making shifts in their family budgets; a shift that can be an advantage to local farmers.

REGULATIONS & TOWN POLICIES

The present Planning and Zoning Board is farm friendly, has farmers on it, and upholds that Woodstock is a right-to-farm town. This is more important than specific regulations. All farmers whether commercial or casual need flexibility, both in the present types of farming and whatever is to come in the future. The best way to stay flexible and farm friendly is to refrain from new regulations whenever possible, and to stay on top of agricultural related P&Z issues as the town grows.

ZONING

- Continue to support flexible regulations on buffers, structures, signage, and livestock waste setbacks flexibilities and exemptions for farming as they exist today, rather than setting specific limits.
- Support present standards regarding regulations on seasonal farm stands, retail sales, % locally grown raw material content, on-site processing, and expansion of sales areas as they pertain to adequate and safe parking, seasonal flexibility, and public health.
- Provide support for future Agri-tourism such as events of limited duration on farms and "farm stays" (B&Bs at farms) without undue regulation.
- Support on-site housing for seasonal and permanent agricultural workers in appropriate trailers or buildings.
- Support alternative energy sources for farming such as windmills and solar arrays which may be crucial for a farm's financial survival.

SUB-DIVISIONS

- The WAGC should continue to be a part of the CC review of subdivisions.
- Ensure that the need for adequate buffers between farmland and house lots is based on the topography of each particular piece of land.
- Ensure that when determining set-a-side land for agricultural purposes, that the set-a-side land be large enough and sited such that it can actually be used for agriculture.
- Support and ensure that as Woodstock seeks to preserve agricultural lands, this is accomplished by not eroding the value as assets for farm loans. Specifically, the issue of financial hardship created by the 50% set aside, 1000' curb cut, and ridge lines for farmers needs to be addressed.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

- Endorse and encourage agricultural management practices which appropriately protect air, water, soil, carbon, and wildlife without undue hardship on the farmer.

FARMLAND PROTECTION and CONSERVATION

- Encourage the selectmen and Board of Finance to exhibit strong leadership and commitment of dollars to the preservation and acquisition of farmland in Woodstock so that we can continue to grow our agricultural businesses.

TAX POLICIES

- Support the Town in its leadership in taking advantage of state tax exemptions and policies that benefit the farmer.

TOWN-OWNED LANDS

- The WAGC should work with the CC to regularly appraise all relevant town owned lands for potential income for the town as leased farmland or forest harvesting.

OTHER TOWN COMMISSIONS and TOWN OFFICES

- Wherever possible, it would be good to have farmers on all town commissions.
- The chairs of CC, WAGC, and WOSFPLAC should meet on a regular basis as their functions overlap so considerably.
- A member of WAGC should sit on the Economic Development Commission.
- Assist the Town Planner in the creation of a booklet on "Farming in Woodstock" to educate the new farmer to the opportunities and regulations in Woodstock similar to the "Starting A new Business in Woodstock", which could then be available on the town website. Ensure that the Building Office give a copy of the "Right to Farm" law along with each new building permit in order to educate the people coming into town.

- Ensure that all farmer oriented town policies/legislation are posted on the WAGC webpage.

FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

The Future of Agriculture in Woodstock is promising and is expected to continue to evolve with further development of existing agricultural commodities and an expansion of new and unique agricultural products and services.

Some current activities/issues which can be expanded and further supported:

- Farm Stands and Farmer's Markets
- On farm retail
- Community Supported Agriculture- CSA
- Celebrating Agriculture Day
- Logging Industry, log buildings
- Christmas trees grown locally
- Wood industry by-products
- Support for the Green industry
- Greenhouses farm operations
- On farm internships with college students
- Farm camps
- Organic products
- Orchards with new varieties of fruits and vegetables
- Horses and stables
- Tour de Farms cycling
- Property tax issues
- Regulations/policies that promote agriculture
- Production and selling of nontraditional ag products and by-products like colostrum
- Positive news media coverage
- Ag in the Classroom training
- Integrated Pest Management
- Agri-Tourism
- Value added products

Future Opportunities to be explored:

- Community gardens
- Commercial kitchen
- Bed & Breakfast farm stays
- Promotion of processing facilities like Pomfret
- Hydroponics
- Recycling for biomass
- Cooperation/joint projects with UConn and Tufts
- Biotechnology and research opportunities
- Loans and Grants with a Grant writer
- Issue Coupons to be used at local ag business
- Further implementation of alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, biomass
- Further use of social media like Facebook and twitter
- Continued development of farm tours such as Vo-Ag tours, scouts, 4-H, youth groups
- Aquaculture
- Umbrella branding

In summary, the future of Agriculture in Woodstock is promising. Continued local action, interest and citizen support will be necessary to provide for the continued existence and viability of our local agriculture. The POCD should be a document that will help steer Woodstock's future which will include our existing agricultural entities as well as the addition of a more diverse mix of viable agricultural operations.